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Interview with Bob Packwood by Brien Williams

Robert 'Bob' W. Packwood

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project
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Robert William "Bob" Packwood **GMOH# 112**
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Brien Williams: This is an oral history interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College with former Senator Bob Packwood. I am Brien Williams, and we are in my Washington, D.C., home, and today is Thursday, June 18, 2009. I thought I'd start by asking you, when I say the name George Mitchell, what comes to your mind?

Bob Packwood: One, brilliant; two, logical; three, extraordinarily good debater.

BW: When did you first become aware of George Mitchell?

BP: When he came to the Senate. I didn't know him before, had never heard of him before. I think that's probably true of most of us, not many of us would know a federal District Court judge in some small state that we seldom went to.

BW: So what was your impression when he arrived, sort of unusually, in the sense that he was appointed and Muskie had gone on to the State Department.

BP: It's no different than when a new senator's elected; there's always a period of judging. Some people make a mistake and think they're a firecracker, and they are judged accordingly. George was very good, I think he had a good sense of politics, he understood that he was coming into an elite organization, and he was coming in not having earned his spurs in the sense of being elected, and therefore he'd better observe the traditions and the niceties and be careful, and he was all of that, and he knew exactly why he was doing it.

BW: Now, did he come in at a time when you still waited a year to do your maiden speech?

BP: No, that had pretty much passed by that time.

BW: So did he assert himself early on, or sort of wait quietly until he learned the rules of the game?

BP: I can't recall whether or not he got fiercely involved in that first year he was in the Senate or not. I'm sure he must have made some speeches, but often, eighty percent of the speeches you make are not for the Senate, they're for an audience someplace else.

BW: Hmm-hmm.

BP: But I don't remember any heavy involvement with him. Where I first got to work with him actually is when he came on the Senate Finance Committee.

BW: And did he have that appointment right from the start or not?

BP: You know, I don't think so. I can't remember when he came on. He was quite critical in the passage of the tax reform act in 1986, there's a possibility he could have derailed it had he chosen to but he, on balance, there were some things in it he didn't like but he saw the tremendous advantage of it and he was very helpful.

BW: That obviously was a plum assignment, and for someone coming in and so new, maybe a little unusual? I don't know.

BP: The Democrats were better than the Republicans at trying to put freshmen, or at least younger members, on the significant committees, most significant being Finance and Appropriations, and trailed slightly by Foreign Relations and Armed Services. The Republicans in that year were a little more hidebound in straight seniority, and if you're there long enough and there's nobody in and you want it, you get it. But the Democrats were a little bit better about seeing talent in some of the younger people. What the internal machinations were to get them on a committee over some senior person who wanted it, I don't know, but they attempted to do it and they succeeded on occasion.

BW: How did the Republicans make the assignments?

BP: I can't remember when the change came, but for the longest time it was straight seniority. You've been in the Senate two years, four years, six years, and you're gradually building up seniority, when a vacancy occurs on a plum committee, if you are the highest person on the seniority list that wanted that position, you got it. They have changed that a bit, but at the time George came in I don't think that had changed on the Republican side.

BW: But it was different, as you say, on the Democratic side.

BP: Slightly different. Seniority was still a heavy weight, but they made a greater effort to do exceptions.

BW: What would you say about Mitchell's growth as a senator? Did you notice anything?

BP: It was exponential. He wasn't there two or three years when you recognized a natural leadership, and this showed itself finally when he became clear he was going to challenge Bob Byrd, and he would have beaten Bob Byrd. There's a couple of reasons that that would have happened: Bob Byrd was an accidental leader, he comes to the Senate and he's there two or three, three or four years, and he's picked as secretary of the majority, which is an inconsequential position, but he stays on the floor and he takes your requests and he listens, and

the Senate was really his only life. And then in 1969, he defeated Ted Kennedy for whip.

Ted was the whip, but he wasn't paying any attention to the job and Byrd was there every day, and the whip is supposed to be there and round up votes and whatnot, and that made him number two in the leadership, and then when Mike Mansfield retired, Bob advanced. But it's one of those where you get advanced to a position where it's beyond your leadership capabilities and that's where you stay. And he stayed there. But of all the leaders, Republican or Democrat, that I served with, he was the worst. We'd be in late at night, two or three in the morning; he just had no sense of balance.

And you could see that the Democrats were frustrated by that, so now along comes George, who is a natural leader. And he, without any other overwhelming leadership position, he indicates he's going to challenge Byrd, and I think some of Byrd's friends said, "Senator, you can go back to being chairman of the Appropriations Committee or you can get beaten for this and go back to be chairman of the Appropriations Committee. So you can choose to announce it, or you can choose to have it happen." But everyone, everybody now recognized that George was just a natural leader.

BW: So it was not a surprise to you that even though he was still basically a freshman senator, that he was selected to be majority leader.

BP: No, you know, could somebody else have done it, somebody that had been there ten years, twelve years? There's always a hesitancy to take on the leader, and it's not unlike the Democratic nomination for the president in 1992; a year ahead of time everybody thought George Bush was unbeatable, so Bill Bradley doesn't run, Sam Nunn doesn't run, and finally this governor from Arkansas runs. I think it was the same thing here, except there's a difference – George was recognized among the group as a natural leader. Was he the only natural leader, could nobody else have done it? Somebody else may have been able to take Byrd out also, but George said, "I'm going to." And having made the step, he got the award.

BW: Do you have an inkling who else might have been able to do that among the Democrats?

BP: I think a Sam Nunn could have, who was highly regarded by the Democrats. But Sam didn't want it, he liked his Armed Services Committee, and he liked what he was doing. I'd have to go back now and see who were the eight or ten bright lights in 1986.

BW: Before he became majority leader he was chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee [DSCC]. Did he have any role in your '86 election, did he support your opponent or?

BP: No, because what happened, the Democratic nominee initially was an incumbent Democratic congressman. And then that congressman had some ethical problems and he was forced to resign the nomination. And it was about mid September when a successor nominee was picked by the Democratic Party; he was a two-term state legislator from Portland [Oregon]

who did not know anything about the state, didn't have any money, and here I am chairman of the Finance Committee and had raised all this money, and I think the Democrats just said, "We have better places to put our time and our money."

BW: Hmm. In doing my research for this interview – and this is off the topic – but I did not realize that after you had beaten Wayne Morse for the position, he came back and tried to run again against you, right?

BP: Well first, in 1972, he ran against Senator Hatfield, which was ironic because Morse had crossed party lines and had supported Hatfield when Hatfield ran for the Senate in 1966 against a very capable Democrat, which, needless to say, irritated a lot of Democrats. And he talked about Hatfield's courage in the Vietnam War, and now six years later he runs against him, now having to explain away all the things he had said in 1966. And then indeed, he ran again against me in 1974, and we just prayed that he would be the nominee, because his numbers were so terrible and he was at this stage pretty much discredited, but then he died midway along and again, they had to pick a successor nominee. That's one where almost all of us on the staff said, "We are genuinely and truly disappointed that he died."

BW: That does lead to a question. Did you ever consider similarities in the political attitudes of people in Oregon as in Maine?

BP: Similar in this sense: I find them both environmentally conscious; they both have a similar topography in the sense of a mountain range and coasts. Oregon, half of the eastern part of the state is desert, which Maine doesn't have any place as best as I can see, but there is a similarity. I've been to Maine a number of times, I like Maine, but there are similarities both of climate and topographically, and the nature of the people.

BW: Hmm-hmm, because I think I can see some similarities between the kind of people that both states send to the Senate, in the sense that they're moderate –

BP: Hmm-hmm.

BW: - thoughtful, play-going people.

BP: Oregon has traditionally been a very socially liberal state, and I've often wondered why. All I have are theories, and one is, we were settled by diverse religions, there was never a dominant religion. We never had prayer in public school, because if we were going to have prayer it was going to be, *whose* prayer were you going to have? And so we just didn't say prayers in the morning. And as there was no dominant religion at all, it made a difference.

Secondly, a heavy Scandinavian influence, and obviously Scandinavians are more liberal than otherwise, both Oregon and Washington had heavy Swedish and Finnish and Norwegian settlements, could be part of it. An example would be Oregon, over the last twenty years, has had the issue of abortion on the ballot five times, in one form or another. Sometimes a

constitutional amendment, twice on parental notification, all of which lost, but the one that amazed me the most was the welfare funding of abortions. Oregon still funds abortions with state funds, at a time when forty percent of any measure that says, "Money shall be spent for…" and put in dot-dot-dot, it gets defeated. So it gives you an idea as to their liberality. They're very pro-gay rights. Doesn't mean they're fiscally liberal, but they are certainly socially liberal.

BW: And I guess euthanasia has had a better hearing in Oregon than elsewhere.

BP: We call it 'death with dignity,' yes, it's not only here in which, in fact this was a classic example: it's on the ballot, it passes. Opponents were absolutely livid that it had passed, so they tried to get the legislature to change it – as it was only a statute, not a constitutional amendment, the legislature could change it. But now what are you going to do? You're a state legislator; just three months earlier in November the people had passed this, are you now going to change it? And they were hesitant, so what they did is put the same thing on the ballot again, and this time it passed overwhelmingly. The people said, "Listen, we told you once, don't bother us again." And maybe that was the worst thing the legislature could have done.

BW: I guess another common element in the two states is that both Democrats and Republicans are successful.

BP: Yes, the Democrats have been more successful recently, as they have been nationwide in a lot of places, I mean certainly New England's a classic example. Maine is an exception, but is a classic example. The Republicans have not done well the last ten years, but up until then it was a good tug of war.

BW: Well I think of Cohen and Mitchell as kind of an interesting team.

BP: Yes.

BW: And they found a lot of common ground. Getting back to Mitchell now as leader, you said that he was one of the toughest leaders in your experience. What were some of the really big battles?

BP: Well, one was capital gains, in the Bush administration, first Bush administration and Treasury was estimating that if we reduced the capital gains, was something like seventeen billion dollars, I can't remember if it was over five years or ten, but it was a gain. Either the Joint Tax Committee or the Congressional Budget Office was estimating about a seventeen billion dollar loss, but this over five or ten years would have been trillions of dollars of transactions. The difference between the two was infinitesimal, but George was able to take that and say, "Are you for the rich or are you not for the rich?" And nobody could make an estimate on that over five years and assume their estimate is right, you know it's going to be wrong but the fact that both sides were that close together, but one was a gain, one was a loss, and he was able to portray that battle as elite and rich versus the common man.

BW: Other big battles come to mind?

BP: No, that's the one I recall. In the Tax Reform Act of '86, where he was a critical part of a small group that I had that was putting it together, he was extremely helpful.

BW: What was his, what did his reputation become in the Republican Caucus as time went on, how was he regarded?

BP: He was regarded - Well, there's always, in both caucuses I'm sure, "Oh, the goddamn Democrats, look at what they're doing, they're in control now and we don't have anything to say." When the Republicans are in control, the Democratic caucus: "Those damned Republicans, we don't have anything to say." It's going on right now, in the House, not so much in the Senate. So that's always there, but it was never in a tone of disrespect for George, it was just, "Oh, the damn Democrats."

BW: So he was regarded as a kind of irritant maybe?

BP: (*substantial revision*:) [No, the Democrats were regarded as the irritant. As George was their leader in that sense it rubbed off on him. But it was not like the feeling that people had about Bob Byrd. He would keep us in session frequently until 1:00 a.m., or 2:00 a.m., or 3:00 a.m., and people would say, "Hasn't he got any other life but this?"]

BW: It's interesting, because one of the comments that I hear people make about George Mitchell is that he was, he also, politics was his life, and so that would be similar to Bob Byrd.

BP: Yes, but he understood that ninety-nine other senators had an additional life. Bob Byrd never understood that.

BW: So what makes a good leader, in either party?

BP: There is no mold. George was a good leader, Mike Mansfield was a good leader, but totally different. Mike had been a history teacher. I remember talking to him one time and he was talking about when he was in the Army in China, "Yeah, that's interesting, [were you] with Claire Chennault or Stillwell?" He said, "No-no," he meant China in the '20s. And his perspective was long, and he was almost beloved as a leader by both sides. And he was very thoughtful, gentle.

Bob Dole was a tougher leader, both as the majority and a minority leader. There is no mold. You either have it or you don't, but if you have it and you try to teach somebody else to do it the way you do it, it isn't likely to work.

BW: But there must be some qualities, or some approach to how you lead others that would be kind of common, wouldn't it?

BP: Well I, yes, if you were going to say: are there traits? Yes. One would be: purpose, simply knowing what you want to achieve, knowing that you want to get from A to Z, and how do you get between the two? And I don't know how many times you go to meetings and you sit there and about halfway through it, you think, "What is the purpose of this meeting?" That's because whoever's in charge of it doesn't quite understand where he wants to go. So purpose would be one.

Integrity: by and large most of the leaders have pretty good integrity, they believe in what they're doing.

Tolerance, in the sense that no matter how swept off their feet they are, always in the back of their mind they know that there's a possibility they could be wrong, and therefore, while they know they're right, they realize they could be wrong. So you've got those qualities.

Discipline, and here I mean personal discipline, and especially hard on the leader. It's a kind of discipline of saying, "No, I can't do this trip to Taiwan because I'm the leader and I've got other things I've got to get done." "I can't go to the Democratic fund raiser in San Francisco on Wednesday night because we're right in the middle of the session, others can go." It's a personal discipline.

BW: Hmm-hmm. You described Robert Dole as a natural, intuitive leader. Would you say the same thing of Mitchell?

BP: Yes. I think by the time he'd been there no more than, I'll take a guess, three to four years, you recognized that. You knew that some day he was going to be in a leadership position, but then the circumstances just lent themselves, in the sense the Democrats had now taken control – as I recall, he was elected in January '87, wasn't he, as leader?

BW: No, '89.

BP: Was it '89? Okay, you're right, January of '89. The Democrats were now in control for '87 and '88, and they weren't doing well, and Byrd [p/o] irritated [not only] the Republicans, but he irritated enough Democrats [that his leadership position became vulnerable]. At that stage he wasn't [feeble], he was still quite cogent, but he just irritated the Democrats.

BW: It is remarkable, because of course when George Mitchell started the campaign for his first election in '82, he was way, way, way behind in the polls, so he just bare-

BP: Who was he, behind who?

BW: To Congressman Emery.

BP: Okay.

BW: And because of a few tactical errors on Emery's part, among other things, he won significantly; I think sixty-three percent of the vote. So that's when he started really, I guess, coming to everyone's attention as a winner. One thing I've heard said about Robert Dole is that he was an impatient man.

BP: Yes, he is impatient, and not overwhelmingly concerned with details. He is impatient. And this is where George - Many leaders, the poor devils – some guy says, "I don't, you better vote by three o'clock because I'm leaving for Boise." Another guy [says], "Don't vote before five, I won't be back from Munich," and they're both in your party. And, "If you have a vote before five o'clock, don't count on me then," that type of thing. On a leader that's just frustrating, you're not paying attention to major policy, you're paying attention to the foibles and irritations of your members, and yet you realize you've got to pay attention. And Bob, in that sense, would be impatient.

BW: That raises an interesting question in my mind. Who actually was keeping track of all these scheduling details, did the leader himself?

BP: No. Well the leader will say, "Next Tuesday we're bringing up Senate Bill 400-410," and in that sense he's in charge of the schedule. Now in the Senate, "I've got amendments, but I don't plan to offer them 'til Thursday, but I'd like to vote final passage on Wednesday." "Well if you want to vote final passage, Bob, you can try, I'm going to be talking then because I have amendments to offer on Thursday." He doesn't have any control of that. You got a lot more control in the House, in that sense, than you do in the Senate.

BW: Right, right.

BP: And he certainly, when he brings a bill up he hasn't talked to every member and said, "You going to be [here], you're not going to be here." He sort of presumes that on important things you *will* be there.

BW: But still, train schedules and flights coming in from Munich and whatnot have to be taken into account.

BP: Well, except you didn't realize when you scheduled this bill last Thursday to come up on Tuesday that Senator Glutz was going to *be* in Munich; he hadn't bothered to tell you.

BW: With Dole I get the impression that sometimes he was able to use his impatience to effect. In other words, he didn't get stuck sitting around with a lot of people listening to a lot of things, he kind of was able to move to the main point and get out of the room and so on. Was Mitchell a more patient leader, do you think?

BP: More patient and more strategic. I think George knew two months, three months ahead, "This is where I want to go, and this is what I have to do to get there." So many people in leadership, because of this attention to these little gnatty details, end up being driven more

toward tactics and less toward strategy. I don't think George was ever deterred from: what is our ultimate goal? And in order to get there, what are the things we can shed, if necessary, to get that ultimate goal?

BW: You made the comment in your interview for the Dole Institute that, I guess talking about Senator Dole as a leader versus presidential candidate, that he did not have a long-term strategy, Dole did not.

BP: You mean as the presidential candidate or as a leader?

BW: Well, even as a leader.

B: No, I think that's right.

BW: And maybe that's not necessary for a leader, would you say?

BP: Oh no, I'd almost put it the other way around. Here would be an example: in 1973, Nixon proposed, and I was carrying it in the Senate because I was on the relevant committee, an employer mandate for health insurance: employers will provide the following, a, b, c, d, buy your insurance wherever, no public plan, just buy it where you want. Had the Republicans had the foresight to adopt that, we wouldn't be arguing about it where we are now, but we didn't have the foresight.

BW: So George Mitchell, would you say he had long term strategies in mind? I think you indicated that a moment ago.

BP: Well, again, I've watched him especially on the tax reform bill. I don't know if you were aware when we were doing this bill, it happened relatively quickly. And when it became obvious that we might have a shot, I would, for only no more than a week, would meet in my office every morning at eight thirty with six senators: [Daniel] Moynihan, George [Mitchell], and [Bill] Bradley on the Democratic side, and then [John] Chafee, [John] Danforth, and [Malcolm] Wallop on the Republican side. And the seven of us would strategize as to what we were going to do on the tax reform bill. And if you had those seven, and then the Finance Committee made it ten, and you've already got these seven already, counting yourself, lined up, you're in pretty good shape. There were things that we were adopting that George didn't necessarily agree with, but he understood that the bill was a good bill, and he would sort of reserve his rights and say, "At some stage I may try to remove this, but let's go ahead." (Before we leave I want you to look at this, or look at this one portion of it and you'll see what I mean, as to his ability to look at a long-term good, remember what I said, and shedding certain things along the way.)

BW: Right, right. Because a lot of politics is compromise, isn't it.

BP: You very seldom get everything and if you do, it is often on the passion of a moment, i.e.

the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which may not in retrospect be good. I remember John Williams, who was a four-term senator from Delaware. He and I only overlapped two years, but in January, when I got there in '69, there was the issue of changing the rules on the filibuster. In fact, we did change them. It was two-thirds present and voting when I started. John was opposed and I asked him why, he said, "Well in my experience," he said, "if the public really wants something they'll get it, and by and large Congress is a grass roots organization." He said, "That may take three or four congresses," he says, "that's not long in the history of the Republic but," he said, "on occasion we move too fast, and I've discovered that we make" – and I loved his term – "we make more mistakes in haste than we lose opportunities in delay." And George, I think, understood that.

BW: Very interesting. Is the House, by comparison, more likely to be more spontaneous and not as long range?

BP: Yes, of necessity. They're all running for office. Classic example is flag burning, the Supreme Court held that a flag burning statute was unconstitutional; it was just before the August recess. The House instantaneously passes a constitutional amendment, it comes to the Senate, but we're just up against the August recess, we didn't do anything. And we went home for the month and we discovered the public wasn't all that upset, and by the time we got back after Labor Day, the issue was gone. We then passed a statute which everyone knew was clearly unconstitutional, but then that satisfies the zealots and it's the damn Supreme Court that has struck it down again. That's an ultimate in long-term strategy.

BW: Right.

BP: You cast the vote that the zealots want, knowing that it's not going anyplace.

BW: And there's a lot of strategy I guess in Congress along those lines, isn't there?

BP: Each party will try to make the other party vote on things they don't want to vote on. That *is* strategy; they're trying to pin them down for the next election. You can sort of see it coming, one of the worst ones are the gay rights issues and the gay marriage issues, where I think the Republicans are on the wrong side but they think they're on the right side and so you try to pin down your opponents on it.

BW: And that's a strategy that's quite common now, it seems to me. Was it the same during your time?

BP: Well, there were different, not on gay marriage, no one ever thought about gay marriage.

BW: No, different issues but -

BP: Yes, you would have those with some regularity.

BW: What about your observations of George Mitchell as leader working with the presidents, Bush One and Bill Clinton?

BP: I haven't got any feel on that. I didn't see him in that capacity.

BW: What about as the, quote/unquote, 'media TV spokesperson for the Democratic Party?'

BP: Excellent, in this sense: George is a lot of things, but he's not a William Jennings Bryan orator, that is not his forte. And on television, I think the media would call him cool. I think it's good. Again, it's that logic, but on *Meet the Press*, I'm not sure if George were the guest that necessarily the audience would stay glued to the television set.

BW: So was that a sign of a good spokesperson, or not one?

BP: Television is a different kind of medium than giving a speech. When I said he's not William Jennings Bryan, but he was a good speaker, but television is not a quote, 'speaking,' unquote, medium, it's a different medium. And politicians, have you ever noticed this – women are better at it than men, they always, most of them go to that school in Iowa that teaches you how to appear on television, they will nod their head or they'll move. Politicians by and large are talking heads, unless they understand it they're just looking right at you and talking to the camera like this, "And this is what I think." There's no body English, because it is not in our nature. And when we're with a crowd, we pick it up from the crowd.

BW: Hmm-hmm.

BP: That's why when I talked about theater, I've always thought it would be much harder to be an actor in Hollywood before a camera than on a stage, where at least you've got an audience to draw from, whereas to act in front of an inanimate camera, to me would be impossible.

BW: And a lot of bored stage hands. When, am I right that you came to the Finance Committee after Dole became majority leader, is that correct?

BP: No, I think I came either in 1973 or 1975. Bob and I went on the committee at the same time, and I just can't remember which year it was.

BW: Hmm-hmm. And what recollections do you have of Mitchell specifically on the Finance Committee?

BP: Well, as I say, I don't recall when he came to it. My specific heavy dealings with him were on this tax reform act, which even to this day, a quarter of a century later, people would say, "What an extraordinary piece of legislation." And there, I was aiming to try to get unanimity on my committee, and I had to give, as I call them, the oily, something they wanted. And if I didn't give it to them, I could have won at thirteen to seven, but if I gave it to them, I can win at twenty to nothing, unless I lose a few people like George, who just can't abide that

amendment. And Bill Bradley was another one.

And I had to take a couple Republicans aside and tell them to vote for this amendment, that we weren't going to keep it in conference anyway, "Don't worry about it, it won't be here when this bill is done, but give me your votes to get this amendment passed that they want, that I don't even like." And so I think I probably got it passed eleven to nine, or twelve to eight or something like that, with the oilies voting for it. And George was terribly opposed to it, but then he, see again, strategically he's thinking, "Now wait a minute, this isn't going to be in this bill when it's over anyway, so why pick a fight on this, which is an unnecessary fight and may delay this bill, which is a hell of a bill."

BW: You were talking about the '86 tax reform, right? When, I'm sorry I've lost my place here. Someone has told me recently that Finance was not George Mitchell's sort of strong point, or mainline.

BP: What else was he on? I can't remember.

BW: He was on Environment and Public Works.

BP: Okay.

BW: And there, that was a natural fit for Clean Air and so forth.

BP: Hmm-hmm.

BW: Did he strike you as being a lightweight on financial matters?

BP: No-no, I wouldn't have had him in this little group of seven if he was lightweight. This guy is a heavyweight. Whether or not Finance was his prime interest or not, you have to understand the momentum of this tax reform bill and how overwhelmingly significant the committee began to regard it.

BW: Hmm-hmm.

BP: And the fact that from the time they first saw the outlines of it until it passed was only twelve days, and putting it together it was critical to me that I had to have that, I had to have the intellectual horses on each side behind this bill *now*. And I called George and, "George, I want you to serve on this," and he was happy to because he had all kinds of things he might be interested in, but I don't recall him in those days, you're right, as being overwhelmingly involved in the Finance Committee the way Bob Dole was or I was. Part of it may have been, during the six years until the Democrats took control of the Senate in '87, Russell Long was there as the senior Democrat, and he had been chairman for fourteen or sixteen years. And he was a dominant force, and sometimes it would be hard to overwhelm Russell.

BW: You probably, it was a major factor in your thinking, probably, that you were coming in after Long, after Dole, two very strong senators.

BP: Hmm-hmm.

BW: And that your success in the '86 Tax Reform Bill was a real triumph.

BP: It was a real triumph. Fortunately, prior to '85, '86 I'd been chairman of the Commerce Committee for four years, so at least I'd had some experience in having to shepherd bills and work with all the members and attempt to get things done and then go to conference. So at least I had some experience in this.

BW: What about the '90 Budget Enforcement Act and the retreat Andrews Air Force Base, were you part of that?

BP: I was part of that, and that's the first time I really had any dealings with Dick Gephardt, who was kind of honcho-ing it. I was very impressed with his ability. I knew who he was but I hadn't had any dealings with him; he wasn't on any committee I was on, I never had any conferences with him, and would meet him sort of once or twice. Yes, that is where Pete Domenici really showing and basically getting the first pay-go put in: "If we're going to do this, we're going to pay for it." That was a whale of an outing to be locked up out there for as many days as we were.

BW: What about Mitchell's role out there?

BP: I don't recall it.

BW: And of course in some people's minds, that's what caused George Bush to lose the '92 election.

BP: Well the trade-off and "read my lips," it, maybe. It's easy enough to point at that. I'm also inclined to think that the bulk of the public might have thought, "He's really out of touch," when he first heard about these scanners at a grocery store, "Gee, we'd even run this?" and people have been doing this for a number of years.

BW: Did you read that the PETA people are complaining now about Obama's having killed that fly the other day?

BP: No, you're not serious? I love it.

BW: So Bill Clinton comes into office and Republicans at some point become pretty certain that they want to stymie a lot of the things that he wants to do. What's the background on that?

BP: Well, one, he wins his budget battle by one vote in the spring, one vote in the House, tie

vote in the Senate and Gore breaks the tie. And the Republicans could see that he was a good communicator – he's good on television. I find him better on television actually than he is at giving a speech. He's great with a crowd, but he's got a twinkle and he understands how to use television. Again, I don't find him an extraordinary orator.

But the Republicans realized he was dangerous, and now along comes the health bill, and Pat Moynihan, who was then chairman of the Finance Committee – Lloyd Bentsen having been chairman and picked as secretary of the treasury – after the budget bill says, "Let's go down and see the president about a health bill." And I said, "Okay." So we go down and Pat says to the president, "Now Mr. President, congratulations on the budget victory, it was a significant vote, I was happy to support it, it's an accolade for you and good for the country."

And he said, "Let me give you some advice on the health bill," he says. "There is no one-vote victory. You can win this 70/30 or you're going to lose it 60/40, but if you attempt to make this partisan, so you drive all the Republicans away, you will drive away the hospitals and especially the teaching hospitals" – of course Pat's thinking New York – "the insurance industry, the American Medical Association, and," he said, "and I'm not sure who else. But just those three groups will be enough to pick off ten Democrats." And the president thanked him, said, "Pat, that's good advice," and they went ahead on their own and you see what happened.

BW: Let's talk about that health care debacle.

BP: Well, what happened is, one of the classic things was a diagram that Arlen Specter had drawn up with arrows going in all directions to different bureaucracies that would coordinate with other bureaucracies, and it was wonderful both accuracy and satire, because indeed the lines went where things were to happen but you could finally see, "Wait a minute, this isn't going to happen at all, this isn't going to work at all."

And so you had people laughing at it after a while, and you had these strong opponents, and you never want to underestimate, and especially when talking New York and California, the power of teaching hospitals. Not just hospitals, but teaching hospitals. And in that bill Clinton had, or Hillary had, call it what you want, a provision that if you were in a teaching hospital and you did residency into a certain area, you had to go out to a poverty area for three years afterwards or something like that, if you got some government support.

And Pat's speaking on the floor, he says, speaking on the bill, he said, "I want my colleagues to understand," he said, "that old Dr. Jones is now going to medical school at Yale, and they're living in Hartford," or living wherever, Hartford I think he said. "That his wife has said to him, 'Jim, I don't care what you say, when you're done with this I am not moving to Harlan County, Kentucky.'" And he said, "There's no way that you can devise a system where these people are going to be compelled," and he was absolutely right.

BW: This is Moynihan.

BP: Yes.

BW: Talking against his own party's health care bill.

BP: Yes, yeah.

BW: When that all got started, like at that meeting at the White House, were you pretty confident that you were going to get a health care bill?

BP: I think there could have been one; Chafee and Durenberger were trying to put one together. There would have been a time, in fact I was talking to Ralph Neas the other day, he said, "There was a time when there could have been a bipartisan bill." It wasn't so much the Democrats in the Congress as the White House was just determined that they were going to have *their* bill. Whether that was the president deferring to Hillary and she wanted to do this, I have no idea about the internal machinations. But it's as if there was no room for compromise.

BW: Hmm-hmm. Now, you and Senator Dole came up with a version of a health care bill during that period, right? What was your motivation, and did you, was that a serious effort?

BP: It was just to stop them, stop the present bill. Dole made me point man on this because, again, it's a heavy Finance issue, and as Finance has Medicare and Medicaid and I'd been on the committee for all those years, I had a reasonable working knowledge of health, not an expert, but a reasonable working knowledge, but better than anybody else who'd probably lead the opposition to the bill. But it was really, the strategy was there to kill this bill.

BW: And then Mitchell came up with a version of his own, quite late in the game.

BP: But it was too late at that stage. At that stage, the concrete had hardened. And nothing was going to pass.

BW: What about his proposal? I've forgotten the exact details, but did it, if it had come up earlier might it have rescued things, or not?

BP: Had George been willing to make common cause with Chafee and Durenberger on a bill that he and let's say one other Democrat, the two of them sponsored, I think something would have passed but he deferred of course to the president, initially. As many of the Democrats would like to do on *this* bill except that what Obama wants, let alone what the Senate Finance Committee was stunned yesterday when they discovered *their* bill is a trillion, six hundred billion dollars, which is going to made deference harder, but at least in the earlier stages there was deference to the White House by the Democrats, and that's understandable.

BW: So over all, what would you say Mitchell's role was in the '93-'94 health care?

BP: Well initially, it was to try to get the president's bill through. When it became obvious

that that couldn't happen and that the Republicans were working on a bill, whether or not he initially tried to float something with the Republicans or came up with his own, I'm not sure, but once the administration had hardened its position, and once any effort by Chafee and Durenberger had been rejected, I don't think anything at that stage could have made it, could have brought it around.

BW: Did you participate with or have input to the Mainstream Group that were -?

BP: Very little. I was aware of it, but as I was leading really the opposition to the bill, they sort of kept me advised but I was not part of it.

BW: Now you're of course famous for having made that quote at the end of all of this, that you killed the health care [bill] but you don't want your fingerprints on it.

BP: My fingerprints on it, that's right.

BW: Have you ever regretted having said that?

BP: No, no, it wasn't a good bill. No, that didn't bother me.

BW: Let's turn to some other issues, for example the Clean Air Act, which I mentioned before. Did you support that?

BP: Well, you mean the – which one? The initial one was back in the '70s.

BW: Right, no, I mean the '90.

BP: I can't remember. I supported the initial one in the '70s, I can't remember about the one in the '90s.

BW: Hmm-hmm, hmm-hmm. And as I said, that was one of Mitchell's main issues. Then in '93 NAFTA came up, and that would have been a Finance Committee [issue].

BP: That one I was heavily involved in.

BW: Right.

BP: And led the battle on it.

BW: In support?

BP: Yes.

BW: Where was George Mitchell on that?

BP: Can't remember where he was on it. At this stage, most of the Democrats were still pretty much pro-trade, at least what I would call the intellectual leading Democrats. That would not be true today, now it's a much more protectionist party than it was, but in those days it hadn't turned that much yet, unless you were a Democrat from Michigan or Ohio or an industrial state, you pretty much still supported the position of: trade is good for the country.

BW: Now of course in Maine you had the downfall of the shoe industry and paper mills and whatnot, so there was an economic impact in there, not with NAFTA.

BP: There was, but I'm not sure you lost those to Mexico so much as the South.

BW: And what about GATT in '94, was that, that was the Uruguay and -?

BP: Yes, the Uruguay, right, GATT was mine too. As I say, the battle would get tougher on occasion if we had suddenly an upturn in the trade deficit and people would start to talk about protectionism. And in any one of these bills, sometimes you would have to protect wooden arrows or flies that you fish with or something like that, but not big things. I'm not sure you could get those things through today. You had to work at it, but you could get them through.

BW: What was your position on earmarks with bills coming out of -?

BP: Never paid much attention. Everybody earmarked, we thought nothing about it, we thought, "Nothing wrong with us picking where things ought to be spent." And the problem with earmarks is that, all right, "You tell me what you want for Maine, I'll tell you what I want for Oregon, and we'll both get it." And my concern is Oregon and your concern is Maine, and so earmarks were always part of any, mainly Appropriation bills. You would see them in Finance, in a different sense. In the Tax Reform Act, one of the things that was eliminated was the deduction of state sales taxes, but not state income taxes. Oregon has an income tax, but no sales tax. There's only six states that don't have sales taxes, and this was obviously where I was going to protect my state. I got tremendous help from New York and California, even though they have high sales taxes, but they also have high income taxes and they didn't – but that's sort of a reverse earmark, where you're watching out for your state, but not in the sense of appropriating something, is saying, "The elimination of the deduction does not apply to *this* deduction."

BW: What was your reelection like in '92?

BP: Tough, it was a tough race. I had a qualified opponent, a congressman, I'd known him for years, and it's the end of twelve years of the Republican [administration]. Any time your party's been in for twelve years, in the presidency, you have problems, because everything that goes wrong is your fault. That is why, if we don't pull out of this recession by November two years from now, a year-and-a-half from now, I think the Democrats are going to suffer. And not sure it's anybody's fault, but you can only blame it on the past so long. Well in '92 there was nothing but twelve years of Republicans to blame it on. And he was a capable guy, so it was a

tough race. He had money and I had money.

BW: Did Clinton play much of a role in -?

BP: No. Again, he's running for election, he's got his own problems. First, he doesn't spend a lot of time in Oregon anyway, and secondly, he's not going to come there and burn some bridges or something that's going to maybe cost him something.

BW: Right, right. What was your take then on the '94 election, with the revolution?

BP: I was surprised. Clinton hadn't been in that long for this to be a reaction, although the Democrats had had Congress now since '87. But frankly, we did better than I would have thought two months out. Now whether it, you know, we all give credit to the Contract for America, and here are the things we're going to do; who knows if that was a factor.

BW: Were there any big budget tax issues between the '93 Clinton budget and the lockout? Was there, am I missing any big battles in that era?

BP: No, it was basically a spending battle, and we were going to cut spending. Although I remember talking to Newt and saying, "Newt, you *know* what's going to happen. What television is going to show is Johnny and Sally and their kids who came here to visit the Washington Monument, and it's closed. And we closed it." I said, "The public's all in favor of cutting out waste, fraud and corruption, but they don't regard the Washington Monument as part of that."

BW: Right. What was his reaction?

BP: Well he sort of agreed, but he really, again, he was thinking of a different strategy. "If we can really show that this is what we *have* to do to get the budget under control, they'll want it under control." Jack Kemp never had that philosophy, he said, "The goddamn Republicans," he said, "they practice root canal economics," as he called it. He said that, "There's no need for this, this is not the battle." Of course Jack didn't care about deficits, as long as you cut taxes he didn't care about deficits.

BW: Were you surprised when George Mitchell announced his retirement?

BP: Yes, I was very surprised.

BW: What was your thinking?

BP: Well, why would anybody leave the Senate? I mean, it's a wonderful job. I'm told he wanted to be baseball commissioner, I don't know if that's true or not.

BW: Do you think he saw '94 coming on?

BP: No, I don't think so. By the time he decided, that he announced he wasn't going to run, I don't think anybody saw it.

BW: And what was it like for you to back to being chair of the Finance Committee?

BP: Well, I enjoyed it. We got welfare reform passed right away, so in that sense it was quite delightful. I was then going through my own ethics problems, and that took a fair portion of my time.

BW: Right.

BP: But not so much that I couldn't do the committee.

BW: And I wanted to ask you about, at the time of your resignation, did George Mitchell have any exchange or words for you during that period?

BP: No, he was very fair in terms of a motion in the Senate to seize my diary and to give me all the time I needed to prepare. They still voted to seize it, I thought unfortunately, but no, he was quite fair.

BW: Did he have any private words with you at any point?

BP: No.

BW: Have you had contact with him since?

BP: Haven't, I'm trying to remember, have I seen him at a social function or so, but you mean, 'in contact,' no, the answer is no.

BW: Describe your brand of Republicanism.

BP: In the old days it's what we would have called liberal Republican. I suppose it's now moderate, but basically it would be liberal on social issues and conservative on fiscal issues. It would regard balanced budgets as important.

BW: And is that still alive, do you think?

BP: Well, the balanced budget part, in theory is alive in the party, but heavens, in the eight years of Bush Two, we spent like crazy. Whatever reputation we may have had for fiscal soundness went out the window, and especially with the drugs and Medicare bill, which we just didn't pay for and then there it is. I mean, do people like it? Yes. Do they get the use of it? Yes. Funny, nor did we get any credit for it. I mean, not only did we ruin our reputation as fiscal conservatives, we got no credit for the bill.

BW: So do you see the liberal-slash-moderate wing of the party reviving?

BP: Well, it doesn't worry me too much for this reason: political parties like to win, and Oregon state for the last years has been a disaster for Republicans. Sooner or later, the party realizes, as the conservative party in Britain is now realizing, "We have to change or we're not going to win." And if those who say, "We don't care if we win, we've got to stick to our principles" – what is the possibility of happening is you disappear, your party disappears and another party takes its place but normally, when you get that close to it, a party wants to win, they want to stay in existence, and they will change. When they do change, it isn't as if they undo all the things that the other party did. I haven't yet seen Britain undo its national health service, despite the fact that for years the conservatives moaned about it and complained about it, but when they're in they don't do anything about it, nor are they *going* to do anything about it.

BW: How would you describe a George Mitchell Democrat?

BP: He is liberal, I would say liberal, reasonable, he's not going to be swept off of his feet by fads. There are some who are swept off their feet. But he is liberal, no question about it. He understands where you've got to compromise your liberality to get half of what you want, and you get your half and then two or four years later you work on the other half and you get a third of the other half; that part he understands. Often zealots don't understand that.

BW: But you would not call him fiscally conservative.

BP: No.

BW: What was his fiscal policy?

BP: Well, I'm not sure he had one. I don't think that was his main concern. By and large, the public associates fiscal policy, I think, with the president. They can wail about Congress and say, and Congress always has terrible approval ratings, it doesn't matter which party has Congress. But I think the public, in the sense of trillion-dollar deficits, are inclined to say, not, "The Democrats in Congress," they're inclined to say, "Obama." They may not care about the trillion-dollar deficits, and it may not hurt them, but if the public *thought* that the trillion-dollar deficit suddenly caused ten percent inflation and eleven percent unemployment, *then* they would blame the president, i.e., the Democrats.

BW: Hmm-hmm. Do you think that the George Mitchell-type of Democrat is an endangered species, or not?

BP: Well, that's hard to say because I regarded George as mainstream, and so far I don't regard them as endangered; they're still the bulk of the party. The firebrand-left out in Marin County, California, are not the typical Democrat. In fact, both Schumer and the chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign [Committee] realized that, and they were willing to pick

candidates that didn't fit the national Democratic mold at all. The classic one, I've got a story out of the *New York Times* about a guy named Bobby Bright was running for Congress in Montgomery, Alabama, open seat, and he was pro-gun, anti-choice on abortion, had ads talking about the reverence for life, and the ads were paid for by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, and the guy wins by about 50.2 percent of the vote, because they understood what was necessary to win. Now, can they count on his votes on those things in the House? Absolutely not. And there's about fifty of them they can't count on, on *those* kind of votes. But would they rather have them or a Republican? They'd rather have them.

BW: So what you're describing is the Democratic Party making a move to become successful, just in the way that you said earlier that the Republicans need to.

BP: They're starting after thirty-five years in the wilderness in the South to recapture the South, but they're recapturing it with people that *fit* their districts or their states.

BW: Did you go on any CODEL [congressional delegation] with George Mitchell?

BP: No, no, never did.

BW: Do you have any George Mitchell stories to tell, you know, offhand things or-?

BP: Well for a number of months in '89, he dated my former chief of staff, Janet [G.] Mullins [Grissom]. Don't know if you've interviewed her or not. She would be an interesting one to interview, because she tells a wonderful story. It was a presidential dinner and she was going to be going to it, I don't know if it was a State dinner or whatnot, and she was, at this stage, in the White House as assistant secretary of state for legislative affairs, the lobbyist for the State Department.

And so somebody in the State Department, because Janet had not been to one of these functions before, said, "Now Janet, you'll be sitting further down the line and there will be name tags and whatnot." And she regarded this guy as kind of an uppity guy anyway, and she'd nod and she paid attention. Well, that night she was George Mitchell's date at the function, and she's right up next to the president. And she said she kind of looked down the table and waved at him, the other guy. Janet used to have a number of stories, none of which I will relate to you, but she'd be fun to interview from a different standpoint.

BW: Right, right, I'll look into that. How do you think George Mitchell ought to be remembered?

BP: Classy, classy, good leader. When he left the Senate it was a loss.

BW: Anything else we should say?

BP: Don't think so. You look at this, and I want to get it back when you're done. It's very

short, but there's an interesting debate just prior to the passage of the Tax Reform Act. In fact, there's only two things on here, the debate between Russell Long and George Mitchell, where you'll see where he's talking about the oil amendment that I referred to that I put in the bill, and he raises the arguments against it that are absolutely logical, there is no rebutting what he is saying.

And then the other thing is just a vote in the committee that night, this all takes place in, the total time on this is maybe ten minutes, total, and George votes for the bill. So he says, "Yes, I can't stand that amendment, I think it's terrible, but on balance" – first I assured him it wouldn't be in the bill – "but on balance, let's move this bill forward."

BW: Good, good.

BP: So call me when you're done with that.

BW: All right, thank you, and thank you very much for this interview.

BP: You bet, happy to do it.

End of Interview